



Department of
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Fact Sheet

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VA Benefits for Filipino Veterans

Citizens of the Republic of the Philippines who serve today in the U.S. Armed Forces are eligible for VA benefits under the same criteria as other U.S. military veterans. However, eligibility for VA benefits for Filipino veterans who served in recognized units of the Philippine Armed Forces – especially during World War II – is not so clear-cut.

The Philippine Islands gained their independence from the United States in 1946 following a transition period that was interrupted by World War II. During World War II, Filipinos served in a variety of units, some coming under direct U.S. military control, others having no ties to the U.S. military, and still others falling somewhere in the middle. Federal law, international treaties and court cases have taken up the question of which VA benefits should be given to various groups of World War II Filipino veterans.

The United States recognizes service in four groups as qualifying for some VA benefits:

- **Regular, or “Old,” Philippine Scouts.** Regular Philippine Scouts, or "old scouts," were members of a small, regular component of the U.S. Army that was considered to be in regular active service. Originally formed in 1901, long before any formal plan for Philippine independence, the Regular Philippine Scouts were part of the U.S. Army throughout their existence.
- **Commonwealth Army of the Philippines.** Also known as the Philippine Commonwealth Army were called into the service of the United States Armed Forces of the Far East (USAFFE), its members served on or after July 26, 1941, and before June 30, 1946.
- **Guerrilla Service.** People in this group served as guerrillas in USAFFE in resistance units recognized by and cooperating with U.S. forces between April 20, 1942, and June 30, 1946.
- **New Philippine Scouts.** New Philippine Scouts were Philippine citizens who served with the U.S. Armed Forces with the consent of the Philippine government and served between Oct. 6, 1945, and June 30, 1947.

Entitlement to VA Benefits

Filipino veterans who served with U.S. forces in the Regular Philippine Scouts before October 6, 1945 are entitled to all VA benefits under the same criteria as apply to any veteran of U.S. military service. Those benefits are paid at the full dollar rate and their dependents and survivors are entitled to benefits under the eligibility rules common to the survivors of all U.S. veterans.

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Veterans of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, recognized guerrilla forces, and the New Philippine Scouts are entitled to compensation for service-connected disabilities. They are not entitled to disability pension for non-service-connected disabilities, nor are their survivors entitled to death pension.

Benefits for veterans of the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla forces, and the New Philippine Scouts who live outside of the United States are paid at the rate of 50 cents for each dollar. Legislation was enacted in 2000 (Public Law 106-377) that provides full dollar rate compensation payments to veterans of the Commonwealth Army and recognized guerrilla forces who are residing in the United States if they are either U.S. citizens or lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens.

Another 2000 law (Public Law 106-419) authorizes VA to pay burial benefits to the survivors of certain veterans at the full dollar rate for veterans who were residing in the U.S. on the date of death. Those veterans must also have been either United States citizens or lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens. This law covers only Commonwealth Army and recognized guerrilla service. It does not cover the New Philippine Scouts. Eligibility applies to deaths on or after November 1, 2000. Burial benefits for these veterans also include interment in any national cemetery with available space, a burial flag, and a grave marker or headstone.

Legislation was enacted in 2003 (Public Law 108-183) authorizing VA to pay burial benefits to the survivors of New Philippine Scouts as well, at the full dollar rate, if the veterans were lawfully residing in the United States on the date of death, and were United States citizens or lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens. Eligibility applies to death on or after December 16, 2003.

The survivors of Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla forces, and New Philippine Scouts veterans who are entitled to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation are paid at a rate of 50 cents for each dollar when residing in the Philippines. Survivors residing in the United States and who are either U.S. citizens or lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens are entitled to full dollar payment.

Health Care Benefits

Filipino Commonwealth Army Veterans, including those who were recognized by authority of the U.S. Army as belonging to organized Filipino guerilla forces, and new Philippine Scouts are eligible for VA health care benefits in the U.S. on the same basis as U.S. veterans if they reside in the United States and are citizens or lawfully admitted for permanent residence. Old Filipino Scouts are eligible for VA health care benefits based upon their status as U.S. veterans.

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In the Philippines, the Republic of the Philippines government provides medical care to eligible Filipino veterans. Filipino veterans are ineligible for VA health care in the Philippines. Due to a recent change in the law, U.S. veterans are eligible for medical care for both service-connected and non-service-connected disabilities at the VA outpatient clinic in Manila. U.S. veterans there also are eligible for hospital care for service-connected disabilities, which is provided under VA contract.

Background

The origins of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines are in the early 1900s when the United States assumed formal sovereignty over the Philippines. At that time, the United

States was preparing for the Philippines to become a sovereign nation. Public Law 73-127, enacted in 1934, reflects this. It required the Commonwealth Army to respond to the call of the President of the United States under certain conditions. In fact, President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the Commonwealth Army to service on July 26, 1941, and it served with the USAFFE command throughout World War II.

Public Law 79-190, enacted in October 1945, authorized recruiting 50,000 “new” Philippine Scouts in anticipation of needing local occupational forces. President Truman acknowledged the contributions of the Philippine people who fought under the umbrella of the USAFFE command to defend the Philippine Islands against occupation by the Japanese. He called for a study to determine the level of benefits appropriate to conditions in the Philippines. The reduced rate of benefits to veterans living there was based on the different economic conditions in the Philippines and the United States.

Current laws affecting these benefits date to congressional actions in 1946 that specified that the service of groups other than the Old Scouts would not be considered U.S. military service. VA officials considered that Filipino military service met the statutory definition of a U.S. veteran until Congress passed Public Laws 79-301 and 79-391 in 1946. Public Law 79-301, the First Supplemental Surplus Appropriation Rescission Act, authorized a \$200 million appropriation to the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, with the provision that service in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines should not be deemed to have been service in the military or naval forces of the United States. Public Law 79-391, the Second Supplemental Surplus Appropriation Rescission Act enacted in 1946, provided that service in the New Philippine Scouts was not deemed U.S. military service.

The U.S. government also gave the Philippine government grants of at least \$500,000 per year for more than 30 years, starting in the 1960s, to help the VMMC upgrade its equipment and physical plant. A VA contract with the VMMC was expanded by legislation in 1963 permitting the center to care for non-service-connected conditions of Filipino and U.S. veterans. Legislation in 1973 permitted VA itself to provide medical treatment of service-connected conditions (and non-service-connected illnesses in certain conditions) for Philippine Army and New Philippine Scout veterans.

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The half rates of compensation to most Filipino veterans living in the Philippines, now in federal law, were intended to reflect that the Philippines had a lower cost of living than the United States. Since World War II, however, many Filipino veterans and their dependents have immigrated to this country.

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